

Rep. Barrow Backs Congressional Efforts to Help Protect Iraq's Christian Population

Washington, DC – In a letter to President George W. Bush, 12th District Georgia Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) recently joined together with a bipartisan group of congressional leaders urging the President to work closely with America's international allies towards ensuring the welfare of the endangered Iraqi Christian population.

Iraq's indigenous Christian population represents the oldest surviving Christian population in the world. While they make up only 5% of Iraq's population, they've accounted for more than 40% of the refugees fleeing the country in recent years. During military operations in Iraq over the past four years, Iraqi Christians have been strong supporters of coalition efforts to establish a stable democratic state in Iraq.

As a small minority within the Iraqi population, Iraqi Christians have neither a strong voice in Iraqi national politics nor the resources necessary to deter the constant harassment and violence perpetrated by radicalized ethno-religious factions surrounding them, Barrow and his colleagues wrote in the letter to President Bush. Without a drastic improvement in the current situation we may well witness the complete loss of the Iraqi indigenous Christian community, a community that has survived in the region for over 2,000 years.

June 28, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush, President

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As Members of Congress who share the concerns of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the welfare of Iraq's Christian population, we are writing to express our gratitude for your attention to this critical humanitarian issue, and to urge you heed the Pope's urgent advice and devote increased resources toward ensuring the welfare of the endangered Iraqi Christian population.

In the years since the fall of Saddam Hussein's tyrannical regime, Iraqi Christians, largely residing in the Nineveh Plain of Northern Iraq, have diligently supported U.S. and coalition efforts to develop a democratic, pluralistic state in Iraq. Unfortunately, despite their high level of cooperation, constant reports of unspeakable violence and persecution demonstrate beyond a doubt that the general security and development needs of Iraqi Christians are not being met.

As a small minority within the Iraqi population, Iraqi Christians have neither a strong voice in Iraqi national politics nor the resources necessary to deter the constant harassment and violence perpetrated by radicalized ethno-religious factions surrounding them. This persistent state of insecurity has led to a mass exodus as disproportionately high numbers of Iraqi Christians flee their homes to find safe haven as refugees in foreign lands. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Christians today make up only 3% of Iraq's population, but nearly 40% of the total number of refugees fleeing Iraq. As Pope Benedict cautioned in your recent discussions, we are seeing the birth of an Iraq that does not tolerate the Christian religion.

It is estimated that as many as half the Iraqi Christian population has already left since 2003, with thousands more internally displaced within Iraq. Most often those who leave the country encounter governments not willing to receive them. This is a tragic situation that requires a comprehensive and assertive response, both to resolve the issues myriad facing the displaced, and to adequately provide for the safety of those remaining in Iraq. Without a drastic improvement in the current situation we may well witness the complete loss of the Iraqi indigenous Christian community, a community that has survived in the region for over 2,000 years.

If a fully-functioning and sustainable democracy is to emerge in Iraq it is critical the rights of minority groups are protected. We share Pope Benedict's grave concern, and urge you to increase efforts to work with our allies to improve the welfare and security of Iraq's indigenous Christian and other minority populations.

Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

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